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JOE'S COMICS
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STRACZYNSKI
FRANK
GORDER
KEMP
DREAMER
FRANK
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midnight nation
created by j. michael straczynski

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main cover B
dynamic forces exclusive
dynamic forces europeum exclusive

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00121

MIDNIGHT NATION™ Vol. 1, Issue 1, OCTOBER 2000. SECOND PRINTING. Published by Image Comics Inc. Office of Publication: 1071 North Batavia Street Suite A Orange, California 92867. $2.50 US/$4.00 in Canada. Midnight Nation™ it's logo, all related characters and their likenesses are ™ & © 2000 J. Michael Straczynski and Top Cow Productions Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. The entire contents of this book are ™ & © 2000 Top Cow Productions Inc. Any similarities to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. With the exception of artwork used for review purposes, none of the contents of this book may be reprinted in any form without the express written consent of J. Michael Straczynski, Marc Silvestri or Top Cow Productions Inc.

PRINTED IN CANADA

SCENE REPORT: Head north, feet southwest, bent at the knees, arms folded across stomach. No ID.
Victim appears to have been led into the alley and forced to kneel. One clean bullet hole through the heart. Execution style.
Possibilities: gang-killing, drug deal gone bad, extortion.
Male black, 20-25 years, 5'8", brown eyes.
HIS EYES WERE OPEN, STARING UP AT THE SKY. THERE WAS NO PAIN IN THEM, ONLY A LOOK SOMEWHERE BETWEEN CONFUSION AND WONDER. RAIN FELL ON THE OPEN EYES AND POOLED THERE.
FOR SOME REASON, THAT BOTHERED ME MORE THAN THE BLOOD. EYES WERE SUPPOSED TO BLINK WHEN YOU SPLASHED WATER IN THEM. THESE DIDN'T.
LIEUTENANT GREY?

MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE JUST CALLED. THEY'RE RUNNING LATE, FIGURE TWENTY MINUTES.
DAMN.
THE BODY WAS COLD, WET WITH RAIN. EVERY ADDED MINUTE WOULD MAKE IT HARDER TO DETERMINE THE TIME OF DEATH BY RIGIDITY AND TEMPERATURE.
ALREADY THE WOUND HAD BEEN WASHED CLEAN, THE BLOOD CARRIED AWAY WITH THE RAINWATER THAT HAD PROBABLY ELIMINATED MOST OF THE PHYSICAL EVIDENCE.
ANY OF THEM SEE ANYTHING?
NOPE. ONE GUY THINKS HE HEARD A GUNSHOT AT ABOUT TWO, MAYBE TWO-FIFTEEN, BUT HE'S NOT SURE.
DID HE SAY WHY HE WAS AWAKE AT TWO O'CLOCK ON A SUNDAY MORNING?
NO, SIR, I GUESS HE WAS ASLEEP AND THE SOUND WOKE HIM UP.
STOP GUESSING AND TAKE HIM IN FOR QUESTIONING. IF HE WAS ASLEEP, I WANT TO REASSURE HIM THAT WE'RE NOT GOING TO TAG HIM AS A WITNESS. IF HE WAS AWAKE, I WANT TO KNOW WHY.
I DON'T--
SIX TIMES OUT OF TEN, THE FIRST PERSON TO GIVE US SOLID INFORMATION IS THE KILLER. HELL, SOME OF MY MOST COOPERATIVE WITNESSES HAVE BEEN KILLERS. THEY THROW IN ALL KINDS OF CRAP TRYING TO THROW YOU OFF THE TRAIL. THEY TELL YOU IT HAPPENED AT TWO SO YOU DON'T ASK WHERE THEY WERE AT ONE. GOT IT?
YES, SIR, LIEUTENANT. I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT.

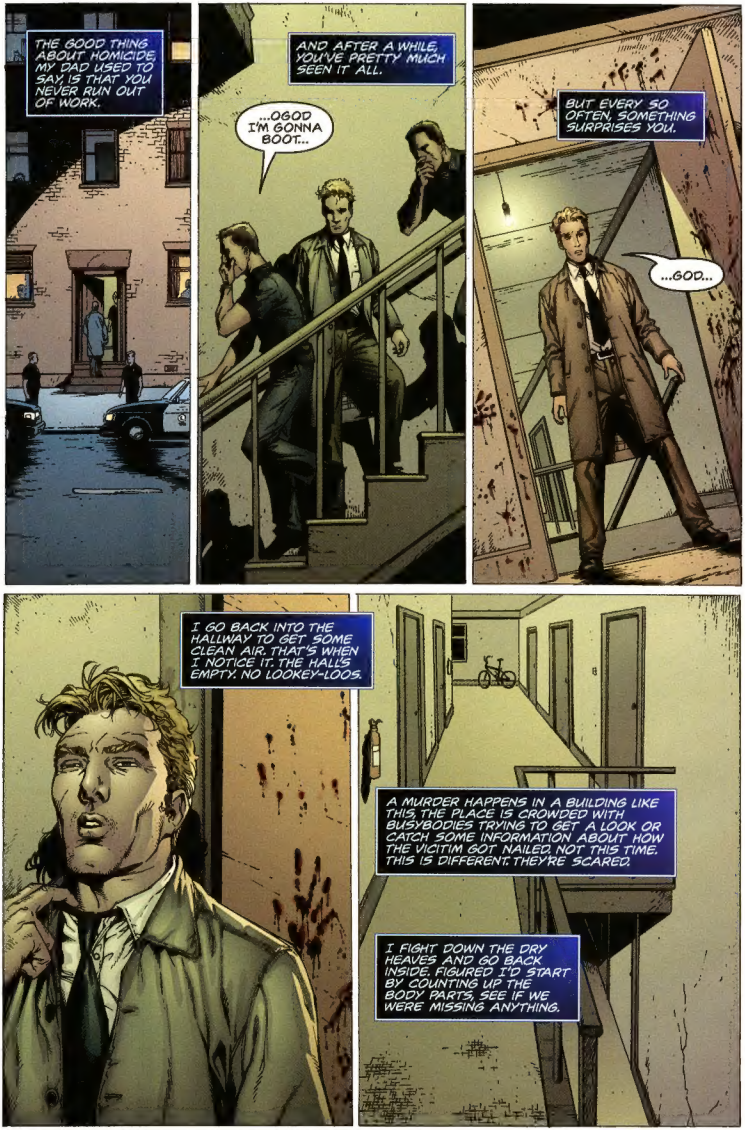
AS USUAL, I BURN EVERY INCH OF THE SCENE INTO MY BRAIN. I'LL NEED TO SEE IT IN MY MIND'S EYE A WEEK OR A MONTH OR A YEAR FROM NOW, ASSUMING IT EVER COMES TO COURT. BUT I ALWAYS LEAVE FEELING I'VE MISSED SOMETHING OBVIOUS.
BUT THEM...THEY DON'T MISS A THING. IT'S JUST ANOTHER SHOW TO THEM.
JUST ANOTHER GODDAMNED SHOW.
I MOVE DOWN THE STREET TO GET A FEELING FOR THE AREA. FIGURING WHICH WAY THE VICTIM CAME MIGHT TELL ME WHO BROUGHT HIM HERE.
THEN I SEE THE FLASHLIGHT. ON. OFF. ON. GREAT. SPY STUFF ALL OF A SUDDEN.
COULD BE SOMEBODY WITH INFORMATION.
AND IT COULD BE FIVE GUYS WAITING TO BLOW MY BRAINS ALL OVER THE STREET. I DECIDE TO CHANCE IT.

WHAT'S UP?
YOU THE COP CHECKING OUT WHO SMOKED TOBY?
TOBY AT LEAST NOW I'VE GOT A NAME.
YEAH. YOU A FRIEND OF HIS?
BEEN FRIENDS A LONG TIME. GREW UP TOGETHER, YOU KNOW?
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
YOU DON'T GOT TO KNOW THAT.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE HIS FRIEND.
I WAS. BUT AIN'T NOTHING HELPED IF BOTH OF US GET KILLED.
OKAY. SO: WHAT HAPPENED? WHO KILLED YOUR BUDDY?
TOBY WAS MOVIN' STUFF, YOU KNOW, CRACK AND THAT SHIT. STARTED TO GET TOO BIG, GOT TO BE TOO MUCH HIS OWN SELF, YOU KNOW? STARTED MAKING TROUBLE FOR JAEKER AND SOME OF THE OTHERS 'ROUND HERE THAT ARE UNDER PROTECTION.
WHOSE PROTECTION?
PETSV
WE DON'T TALK ABOUT THAT SHIT, MAN, NOT OUTSIDE, AND NOT AT NIGHT.
TALK ABOUT WHAT? WHO DID HE PISS OFF? THE JAMAICANS? THE CRIPS? THE--
I DON'T BELIEVE IT. MAN, YOU LIVIN' RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT, AND YOU DON'T KNOW JACK.

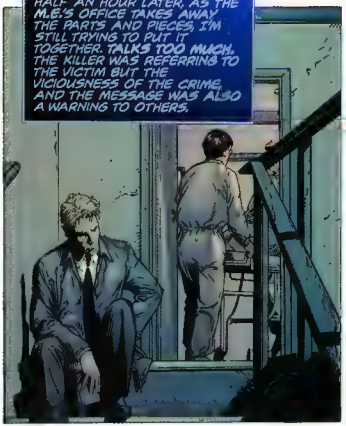
THEN WHY DON'T YOU EXPLAIN IT TO ME? YOU CALLED ME, REMEMBER? NOW IF YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SAY, SAY IT, BECAUSE I DON'T LIKE STANDING AROUND GETTING MY BUTT COLD, MY HEAD WET AND MY CHAIN YANKED. WHO OFFED YOUR BUDDY?
THE MEN.
COPS?
NO, NOT THE MAN, THE MEN.
AIN'T GOT NO OTHER NAME. DON'T NEED NO OTHER NAME. FOLKS AROUND HERE KNOW WHO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY SOMEBODY'S BEEN TOUCHED BY THE MEN.
WELL, I DON'T. SO WHY DON'T WE GO SOMEPLACE WARM WHERE WE CAN TALK ABOUT THIS AND---
SCREEEEH!
...OH CHRIST...

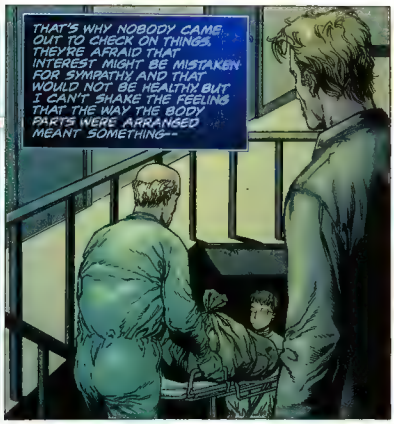
--AMBUSH DAMN GANG BANGERS GOTTA BE NO TIME DAMN HIT THE--
DAAAAAAAAAAAA....
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT? WHO WERE THOSE GUYS? DID YOU GET A LOOK AT 'EM?
I SAID--
AW, CRAP..
SO, DID YOU GO AFTER THEM?

GO AFTER THEM? WHAT'RE YOU, NUTS, VELINSKY? YOU KNOW WE ALWAYS GET STUCK WITH THE CRAP CARS IN HOMICIDE. THEY FIGURE EVERYBODY WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH IS DEAD AND NOT DRIVING REAL FAST.
I'LL GO BACK TONIGHT, QUESTION SOME PEOPLE, SEE WHAT I CAN DIG UP.
I GUESS. I MEAN, WHY BOTHER?
ONE YO KILLS ANOTHER YO. THAT'S EIGHT DEALERS THIS WEEK. THIS TIME LAST YEAR WE WERE AVERAGING SEVEN. I CONSIDER THAT PROGRESS. WHY DON'T YOU GO FIND YOURSELF A REAL VICTIM, SOMEBODY WHO DIDN'T HAVE IT COMING?
VELINSKY IS AN EX-MARINE WHO LIKE TO CLASSIFY MURDERS AS GOOD DEATHS AND BAD DEATHS: A BAD DEATH WAS A FIFTEEN YEAR OLD WHITE GIRL CAUGHT BY A STRAY BULLET DURING A HOLD UP AT A 7-ELEVEN.
A GOOD DEATH WAS ONE DRUG DEALER KILLING ANOTHER. ONE LESS PERP TO WORRY ABOUT LOCKING UP LATER.
DAMN... AND THAT'S A NEW TIE.
AND HE ATE. HE ATE ALL THE TIME. NEVER A HEART ATTACK AROUND WHEN YOU NEED ONE.
LOOK, MY CONTACT SAYS THE TRIGGER MAN WAS UNDER PROTECTION. MAYBE WE'VE GOT SOME NEW BLOOD IN TOWN. IF SO, THEN WE GOT MORE TO WORRY ABOUT THAN ONE DEAD GUY. LIKE TURF WARS. WE SHOULD PAY ATTENTION BEFORE IT COMES BACK TO BITE US. FIND OUT WHO THIS JAEKER GUY IS--
C'MON, WE HEAR THAT STUFF ALL THE TIME, NEVER GOES ANYWHERE. PUNKS ALWAYS MOUTH OFF ABOUT HOW THEY'RE CONNECTED, PROTECTED, WHATEVER.
YOU DIDN'T SEE THIS GUY. HE WAS SCARED. GUY LIKE THAT DOESN'T GET THIS SCARED BY TWO OR THREE GUYS MOUTHING OFF
MAYBE. EITHER WAY, DON'T GET BOGGED DOWN; YOU'VE GOT TWO OTHER CASES STILL IN THE RED, AND THEY HAVE TO TAKE PRIORITY, OKAY?
OKAY, FINE. I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE WHITE VICTIMS FIRST.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I SAID.
YOU'RE RIGHT, SORRY. THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAID.
BUT IT IS WHAT YOU MEANT. I THOUGHT, BUT DIDN'T SAY. ONE CAN ONLY PUSH SO FAR.


THE GOOD THING ABOUT HOMICIDE, MY DAD USED TO SAY, IS THAT YOU NEVER RUN OUT OF WORK.
AND AFTER A WHILE, YOU'VE PRETTY MUCH SEEN IT ALL.
...OGOD I'M GONNA BOOT...
BUT EVERY SO OFTEN, SOMETHING SURPRISES YOU.
...GOD...
I GO BACK INTO THE HALLWAY TO GET SOME CLEAN AIR. THAT'S WHEN I NOTICE IT. THE HALL'S EMPTY. NO LOOKEY-LOOS.
A MURDER HAPPENS IN A BUILDING LIKE THIS, THE PLACE IS CROWDED WITH BUSYBODIES TRYING TO GET A LOOK OR CATCH SOME INFORMATION ABOUT HOW THE VICITIM GOT NAILED. NOT THIS TIME. THIS IS DIFFERENT. THEY'RE SCARED.
I FIGHT DOWN THE DRY HEAVES AND GO BACK INSIDE. FIGURED I'D START BY COUNTING UP THE BODY PARTS, SEE IF WE WERE MISSING ANYTHING.

I THINK IT'S ALL HERE, BUT I DIDN'T...I MEAN, I DIDN'T ACTUALLY LOOK EVERYWHERE, YOU KNOW? I--
THE KID WAS SHAKING. HE'D NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE. THAT WAS OKAY. NEITHER HAD I.
JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU FOUND.
Umm...TWO ARMS CUT OFF AT WRISTS AND ELBOWS, CROSSED ON A CHAIR. ONE SEVERED HAND ON THE DINING TABLE, WRAPPED IN CLOTH. A FOOT SHOVED HALFWAY DOWN THE TOILET. BITS AND PIECES EVERYWHERE ELSE. WE, Uhm, WE CAN'T FIND THE EYES...
WHERE'S THE HEAD?
IN THERE.
FUNNY THING IS, RIGHT BEFORE I OPENED THE DOOR, I HAD A HUNCH WHAT, AND WHO, I WAS GOING TO FIND.
TALKS TOO MUCH
SEMI-SKIM
EVEN WITH THE SCARS, THE SLICED EYELIDS, THE MISSING EYES, I COULD RECOGNIZE HIM AS THE GUY WHO FLAGGED ME DOWN AFTER TOBY WAS KILLED.
TALKS TOO MUCH. HE WAS RIGHT TO BE WORRIED.
WHAT THE HELL DID THEY WANT WITH HIS EYES?


HALF AN HOUR LATER, AS THE M.E.'S OFFICE TAKES AWAY THE PARTS AND PIECES, I'M STILL TRYING TO PUT IT TOGETHER. TALKS TOO MUCH. THE KILLER WAS REFERRING TO THE VICTIM BUT THE VICIOUSNESS OF THE CRIME, AND THE MESSAGE WAS ALSO A WARNING TO OTHERS.


THAT'S WHY NOBODY CAME OUT TO CHECK ON THINGS. THEY'RE AFRAID THAT INTEREST MIGHT BE MISTAKEN FOR SYMPATHY AND THAT WOULD NOT BE HEALTHY BUT I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT THE WAY THE BODY PARTS WERE ARRANGED MEANT SOMETHING--

OH MY GOD...
WHAT?
I FIGURED IT OUT. IT'S A JOKE. PLAY ON WORDS.
AN ARM ON A CHAIR. ARMCHAIR.
A HAND FOLDED IN A PIECE OF CLOTH. HANDKERCHIEF.
A FOOT IN THE TOILET EQUALS... FOOTSTOOL.

WHAT ABOUT THE HEAD IN THE FRIDGE?
I DUNNO, IT'S...WAIT...A COLD HEAD. A HEAD COLD!

CAN I... CAN I GO NOW?
SURE. GO ON. GET SOME REST.
THANKS, BUT I DON'T THINK I'M EVER GONNA SLEEP AGAIN.

I SPENT THE NEXT TWO DAYS TIED TO THE INTERBUREAU CRIMINAL I.D. SYSTEM. THIS TIME VELINSKY DIDN'T BOTHER ME. TWO EIGHT-BALLS ON THE UNSOLVED BOARD WERE POINTING TO THE SAME KILLER. ONE MORE WOULD INDICATE A SERIAL KILLER, AND VELINSKY DIDN'T WANT THAT, NOT ON HIS WATCH.
IT WAS LIKE ANYTHING ELSE: TWO OF ANYTHING IS A COINCIDENCE, THREE IS A HOBBY. I HAD TO STOP THIS BEFORE IT BECAME A HOBBY.
TRUE TO THE FIRST MURDER, THE FORENSICS TEAM DIDN'T TURN UP ANY PRIMARY EVIDENCE, NO PRINTS, NO TRACKS, NOTHING. BUT I EXPECTED THAT. NOTHING ON THE MEN, EITHER. NO GANG REFERENCES, NO CULTURAL REFERENCES, NOTHING.
SO I LOOKED ELSEWHERE, CHASING THE ONLY THING I HAD, A NAME. JAEKER. OR JAYKER. OR JAY KERR. I NEVER GOT A SPELLING. SO I TRIED THEM ALL.
BECAUSE SOMETIMES WE GET LUCKY. BUT LUCK AND A NAME WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH FOR A WARRANT.
LAPD
ARLAN JAEKER
BORN: 3/7/1962
HEIGHT: 6' 3"
WEIGHT: 220
HAIR: BRN
EYES: GRN
ADDRESS:
417 S. MADISON AVE.
APT 3
ARREST RECORD:
ASSAULT WITH A DEADLY WEAPON
EXTORTION
CAR THEFT
ATTEMPTED GRAND THEFT AUTO
ARMED ROBBERY
RESISTING ARREST
CAR-JACKING
ASSAULT
NOW THAT I HAD A TRAIL TO FOLLOW, I COULD BREATHE A LITTLE EASIER. MAYBE EVEN GET SOME SLEEP. THE UNIVERSE WAS BEGINNING TO MAKE SENSE AGAIN. I LIKED THAT.
WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE WAS THAT I STILL HAD NO IDEA WHO THE MEN WERE.

WAKE UP.
IT'S TIME.
IT'S AFTER DAWN WHEN I LEAVE MY REPORT WITH DATA RETRIEVAL TO CHECK FOR ANY OUTSTANDING WANTS AND WARRANTS ON JAEKER. BE NICE IF MY LUCK HELD FOR ONCE.
I TOLD THEM SIX MONTHS AGO TO STOP SENDING ME THE VICTORIA'S SECRETS CATALOG. WITH MARGARET GONE, IT'S NOT AS MUCH FUN ANYMORE.
SPEAKING OF WHICH...
FROM: MARGARET [illegible] 423 N. ABERDEEN PASSAIC NJ
LET'S SEE...I HAVEN'T MISSED ANY ALIMONY PAYMENTS. IT'S NOT MY BIRTHDAY, AND MARGARET'S NEVER BEEN THE KIND TO SEND LETTERS FROM CAMP.
"HI, DAVID. I'M FINE. HOW ARE YOU? GROW BACK ANY OF YOUR HEART SINCE I SAW YOU LAST?"
SCREW IT...
I NEED A SHOWER MORE THAN I NEED BAD NEWS RIGHT NOW. LIKE MY DAD USED TO SAY, GOOD NEWS CAN WAIT, BAD NEWS WILL REFUSE TO LEAVE.
THEY PROBABLY WON'T HAVE ANYTHING FOR ME UNTIL TONIGHT ANYWAY.
BRRRP
BRRRP
BRRRP
CLICK!
LIEUTENANT GREY, THIS IS LOUISE IN RECORDS. THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WANT TO KNOW: WE'VE FOUND AN OUT OF STATE WARRANT FOR JAEKER'S ARREST FROM SEATTLE. I'LL LEAVE IT FOR YOU ON YOUR DESK.
SONOFABITCH...I OUGHT TO PLAY THE LOTTERY TODAY I'M GOLDEN...

--SO FAR THE TARGET DOESN'T KNOW WE CAN CONNECT HIM TO THE MURDERS IN ANY WAY WHICH MEANS HIS GUARD WILL BE DOWN.
NO.
HAVEN'T I DONE ENOUGH?
WE'LL HIT FAST AND NEUTRALIZE THE TARGET. THE WARRANT ONLY NAMES HIM, SO WE CAN'T GRAB ANYONE ELSE, BUT IF SOMEONE'S THERE AND THEY GIVE US A REASON TO PULL 'EM IN, DON'T HESITATE.
APARTMENT 4H. JUST DO IT BY THE NUMBERS.
SHOULD BE A PIECE OF CAKE.
WHAT THE HELL...WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LIGHTS?
AAAAAGGGHHHH!!!
NOT POSSIBLE. WE MUST ALL SACRIFICE.

THERE'S ANOTHER?
WE'RE ALL ALONE.
STEINHOFF! WHERE ARE YOU?
NOOOO... OHGODD...
JESUS...
LIEUTENANT!
WILLIAMS?
SHIT.

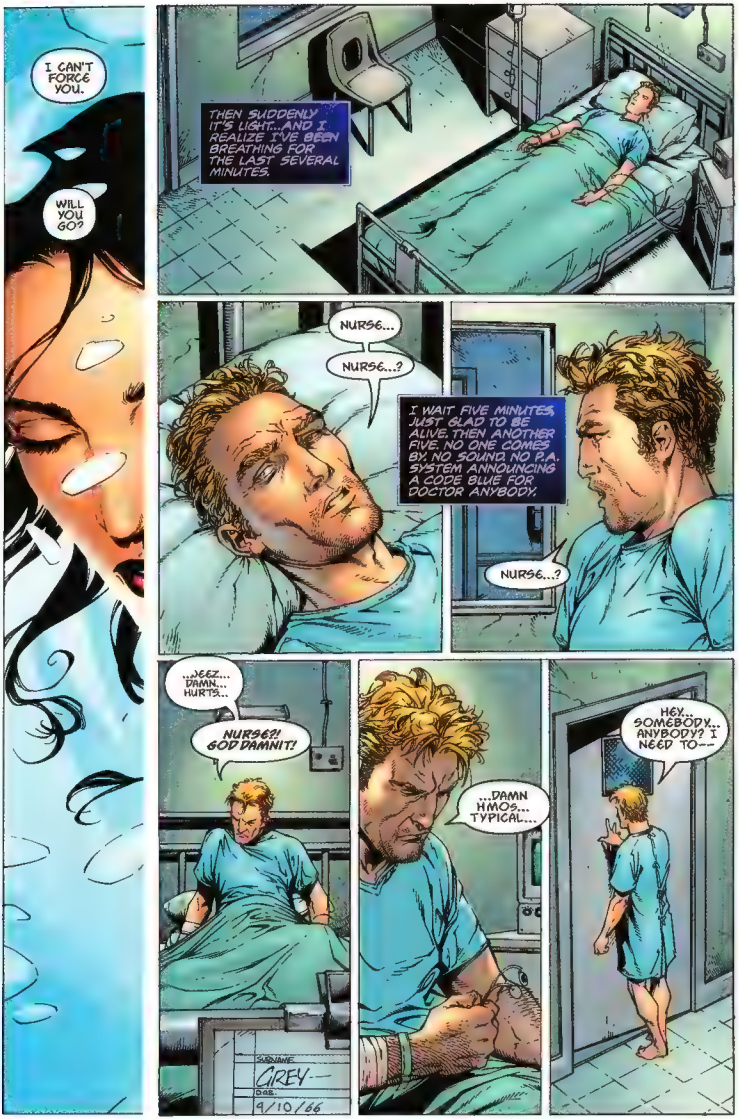
414
HE'S ALONE.
HE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HE'S FACING
WHO DOES?

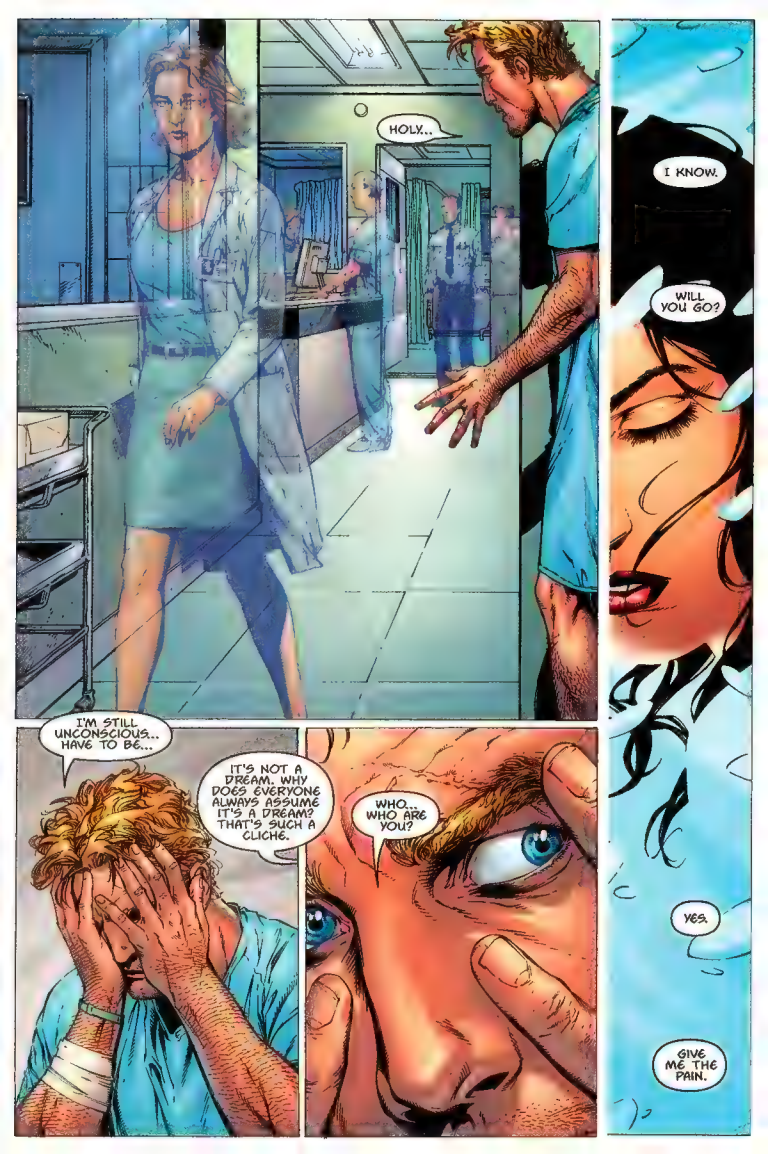
HE'S A FIGHTER.
KILL HIM.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
AAAAGGHH!
UGGGH!
ARGH!
HE CAN'T FIGHT ALONE.
I DON'T WANT TO DO THIS. I CAN'T FACE THE PAIN AGAIN.

PAIN IS INESCAPABLE.
NOT IF I STAY HERE.
...CAN'T FIND GUN...
...CAN'T MOVE...
...STUPID WAY TO DIE...
NO.
JAEKER WAS EXPENDABLE.
THIS ONE MAY BE MORE INTERESTING.
LISTEN... WE'VE GOT MEN COVERING...
AAAGGGHHHHHH!
YES... MUCH MORE INTERESTING.

WE'VE GOT CARDIAC ARYTHMIA...BLOOD PRESSURE'S ALL OVER THE PLACE...
AMBULANCE
...COLD... I'M SO... COLD...
HE'S GOING INTO SHOCK!
I HEAR SHOUTING, AND SIRENS, AND THE SLOW EBB OF MY OWN HEART, AND I WONDER...
AMBULANCE
IS THIS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO DIE?
THEN YOU SUBSTITUTE ONE KIND OF PAIN FOR ANOTHER.
I DON'T WANT TO DIE.


I CAN'T FORCE YOU.
WILL YOU GO?
THEN SUDDENLY IT'S LIGHT...AND I REALIZE I'VE BEEN BREATHING FOR THE LAST SEVERAL MINUTES.
NURSE...
NURSE...?
I WAIT FIVE MINUTES, JUST GLAD TO BE ALIVE. THEN ANOTHER FIVE. NO ONE COMES BY, NO SOUND, NO P.A. SYSTEM ANNOUNCING A CODE BLUE FOR DOCTOR ANYBODY.
NURSE...?
...GEEZ... DAMN... HURTS...
NURSE?! GOD DAMNIT!
SUZANNE GREY— DOB: 9/10/66
...DAMN HMOS... TYPICAL...
HEY... SOMEBODY... ANYBODY? I NEED TO—


HOLY...
I KNOW.
WILL YOU GO?
I'M STILL UNCONSCIOUS... HAVE TO BE...
IT'S NOT A DREAM. WHY DOES EVERYONE ALWAYS ASSUME IT'S A DREAM? THAT'S SUCH A CLICHE.
WHO... WHO ARE YOU?
YES.
GIVE ME THE PAIN.

I'M LAUREL. YOU'RE IN THE PLACE IN BETWEEN. AND IT LOOKS LIKE I'M YOUR GUIDE.
X-RAY
UNTIL THEY FIND YOU. UNTIL THEY KILL YOU.
OR UNTIL YOU TURN. WHICH IS WHEN I'LL KILL YOU.
ANY QUESTIONS?

TOP COW MOOS

HOT! HOT! HOT!

NO.9 SEPTEMBER 2000

on sale now!

MIDNIGHT NATION 1
(W) J. Michael Straczynski (P) Gary Frank
(I) Jason Gorder (C) Dan Kemp

TOP COW is extremely excited to bring you BABYLON 5 and CRUSADE creator, J. Michael Straczynski's eagerly awaited new title, MIDNIGHT NATION which will be released through JMS and Top Cow's very first imprint label, JOE'S COMICS. This latest creation promises to live up to, if not surpass the level of J. Michael Straczynski's highly acclaimed series RISING STARS. This tale is about Police Detective David Grey. A good cop with a good heart, who is trying to solve a murder no one wants, or cares to help solve. In his search for the killer, Detective Grey is more than shocked to find out there are elements to this case which are definitely not from the realm of the world we live in. With pencils by Gary Frank, who's astounding artwork on titles such as Hulk, Wonder Woman and Kin made him the perfect choice for MIDNIGHT NATION, you definitely won't want to miss out on this.

IN STORES NOW!!!

BLOOD LEGACY No3
(W) Matt Hawkins
(co-W) Kerri Hawkins
(P) Mark Pajarillo (I) Edwin Rosell
(C) Matt Nelson

WITCHBLADE/DARKCHYLDE
(W & P) Randy Queen (I) Alp Altiner
(C) Jimmy Yu

WITCHBLADE: DESTINY'S CHILD
PART THREE
(W) Christina Z.
(P & I) David Boller (C)John Starr

COMING SOON!!!

DARKNESS 34
(W) Scott Lobdell (P) Clayton Crane
(I) Kevin Conrad (C) Matt Nelson

RISING STARS PRELUDE
(W) J Michael Straczynski
(PKeu Cha

TOMB RAIDER 8
(W) Dan Jurgens (P) Andy Park
(I) Jonathan Sibal (C) Jonathan D Smith

*Ongoing Notes: Although some titles ship in August, they will not arrive in stores until September

FRANKLY, GARY

YO, JOE

The start of the so called "new millenium" came with some pleasant surprises. One of them was Gary Frank. When his pencils for Kin started rollling in, I was instantly in love with his style, especially his knack for storytelling. As the months passed, the pages kept comin' in looking great and more unbelievably, early. What happens when you bring a writer and an artist who know how to tell great stories? You get Midnight Nation. And, guess what? He's still on time! Actually, he's ahead of schedule!

-SONIA

Sonia Im: Your art meshes perfectly with Joe's [J. Michael Straczynski's] story. It seems as if you really understood what Joe's vision of the story was right from the start. What was your initial reaction to thescript?

Gary Frank: My initial reaction was, "Does it have to be a script?" I usually prefer plot, but if working with JMS meant full script, then so be it. After I'd read the first issue I knew that the book was going to be something special and that I was lucky to be involved.

SI: You are already penciling pages to issue 3. Amazingly, you haven't faltered from your schedule once. Timeliness is something that is lacking in many penciilers today. What do you attribute your discipline to? What keeps you consistently on track?

GF: I was never actually given a schedule but I assume we had a little lead time. The fact is that, if you want to do a monthly book, you can't mess about too much, either on a particular page or in front of the TV. Nothing jars like a change of penciler every few issues so, if you have an excessively laborious style, then you have to change it or stick to one-shots.

SI: What part do your 27 snakes play in all of this?

GF: They can be a distraction. Some of them can be a pain in the neck to feed and you can waste a lot of time trying to persuade them that it's a good idea to eat.

SI: I heard you were in the process of moving and had to find a temporary home for all of them [snakes]. What kind of ordeal was that?

GF: The move didn't happen in the end. I was trying to relocate to Newquay (a small surf-town in Cornwall) but the UK housing market has keeled over. I'm now in the process of damp-proofing my cellar, so the snakes can go down there. It's amazing how quickly some house-hunters want to leave when they find out what lives in my studio.

SI: I'd be running outta' there like the place were burning down! I have a serious phobia of snakes. Actually, I'm gonna have to cut this interview short and call my therapist. See ya!

GF: Okay. Sssssee-ya.

You know, the more I find out about this guy, the more I respect him. I know this sounds like serious brown-nosing, but I've never been one to give credit where it isn't due. And in the case of Joe, it is. Due that is...

-SONIA

SI: I know this isn't the most original question, but I wanna know so I'm askin'... Where did the inspiration for Midnight Nation come from?

JMS:Back in my self-destructive college years, I used to go walking in downtown San Diego at midnight, in some fairly dangerous places. Wouldn't get home until 2, even 3 in the morning. Wasn't doing anything illicit or weird, just...walking, looking at things, watching what is to all intents and purposes a different world going through its paces. Take a picture of any downtown street at noon, and another at one in the morning...the buildings are the same, but the look, the feel, and the people you see there are vastly different, as though there were two different countries time-sharing the same space. I always used to play with the notion that if you knew which street to turn down, and could knock on the right door, and say the right password, you could be admitted to a different kind of world, one that exists

only on the edge of your peripheral vision.

That image, that sensibility, stayed with me forever afterward, and I always knew I wanted to do something with it...and now Top Cow has given me that chance. It's also an opportunity to tackle something where I can sink my teeth into some thematic material about the state of the country, about the lost people and fractured dreams that have become the nation's common coin, to make a point but without ever being preachy about it, because I think then it becomes boring propaganda.

SI: Rising Stars and Midnight Nation are very different stories. I feel some writers tend to stick with the one thing that worked and never try anything different. In your portfolio while there's a supernatural theme running through out, the stories never feel like the "same old thing". You've got the whole outer space thing with Babylon 5, characters dealing with having extra-ordinary powers in an ordinary world in Rising Stars, and a purgatory type world in Midnight Nation. I guess my question is, how do you keep your stories fresh?

JMS: Real simple. Always start with your characters. There are over six billion people on the planet now, and each one of them has a story, a history, a destiny that is unique to that person. As with fingerprints, no two are alike. So if you start with a character, and make that character as true and real as you can, you can then create any situation and it works, each story is different.

It also helps that I'm interested in lots of different things. I like SF, as with B5, but I also like supernatural/anthology stuff (loved working on the new TWILIGHT ZONE), comedy, historical drama...I think that the more varied interests you have, the less chance you have of becoming a one trick pony. And, finally, I like to experiment, to take what I've done before, deconstruct it, and see where it takes me if I turn it upside down or inside out. The worst that can happen is that you'll fail. Which is aces by me, because the only way to succeed is to risk failing from time to time. Yeah, it's a pain when it happens, but the only other option is simply not to try, not to experiment, not to reach...and that is not acceptable to me.

SI: Any chance for a Rising Stars/Midnight Nation cross-over? Kidding! Sometimes it seems these cross overs are appropriate, but sometimes one has to wonder what the intention of them was. What are your thoughts on them [cross-overs]?

JMS: I think that cross-overs stem from either a real interest on the part of the creators, which is good, or from a marketing impetus, which is less salutory. If the characters involved are already living in the same universe to begin with, so it's not a stretch that they could meet, then it's great. If they're not, then it's a bit more dubious. On the other hand, speaking as a comics fan first and a writer second, as a fan of Superman and the Aliens movies, when I see a Superman/Aliens crossover book on the newsstands...I'm there, y'know what I mean? So I may be the wrong person to deal with this issue, because the Pro Writer in me and the Comics Slut in me will get into a fight and that's the kind of conversation that can ONLY end in a gunshot.

SI: Midnight Nation will be the first title to be released under our first imprint label. What are your hopes and plans for Joe's Comics?

JMS: More than anything else, I want to use it to stretch myself as a writer, and to tell the best, most interesting and original stories I can. I don't want to pump out a whole lot of material under the Joe's Comics imprint; I'd rather do three things well than do six things of which 3 were great and 3 sucked. I want to try out some different kinds of writing tools, use the form in different ways, do some very emotional stories because at the end of the day it's ALL

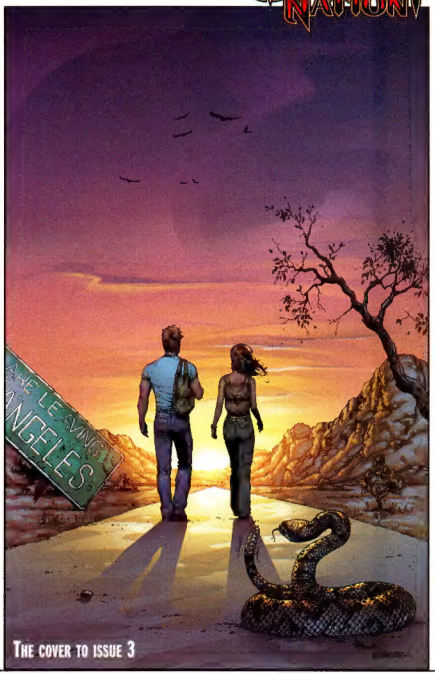
about passion...I want to do something that touches on hard SF in one mini, another that's supernatural horror, another that's a small personal story with text and painted panels on facing pages.

In short, I want to experiment, put myself on the line and see what happens. Which is the good thing and the curse about calling it Joe's Comics. If Megadeathtech Comics tanks, it isn't necessarily attached to any one person's name...if Joe's Comics suck, you know it's Joe's fault since I'm writing all of them. So I'd better make damned sure that these are the best I can make them.

I picked and (with Peter [Steigerwald]) designed a diner logo for Joe's Comics for a reason: there are some diners that you know you can go to any time of night, and you will always get a good, solid meal there. Sometimes it's fancy, sometimes it ain't, but you know that the cook in the back prides himself on making sure you leave feeling satisfied and full. You know his 'heart' is in it. Same here. I only want to do stories where my heart is in it, where I feel I have something to say, and I want to make sure the readers know that when they pick up a Joe's Comics title, they will always get a good, solid story.

That, at least, is my intention going into this. But there's an old joke...how do you make God laugh? Tell him your plans....

-moo.



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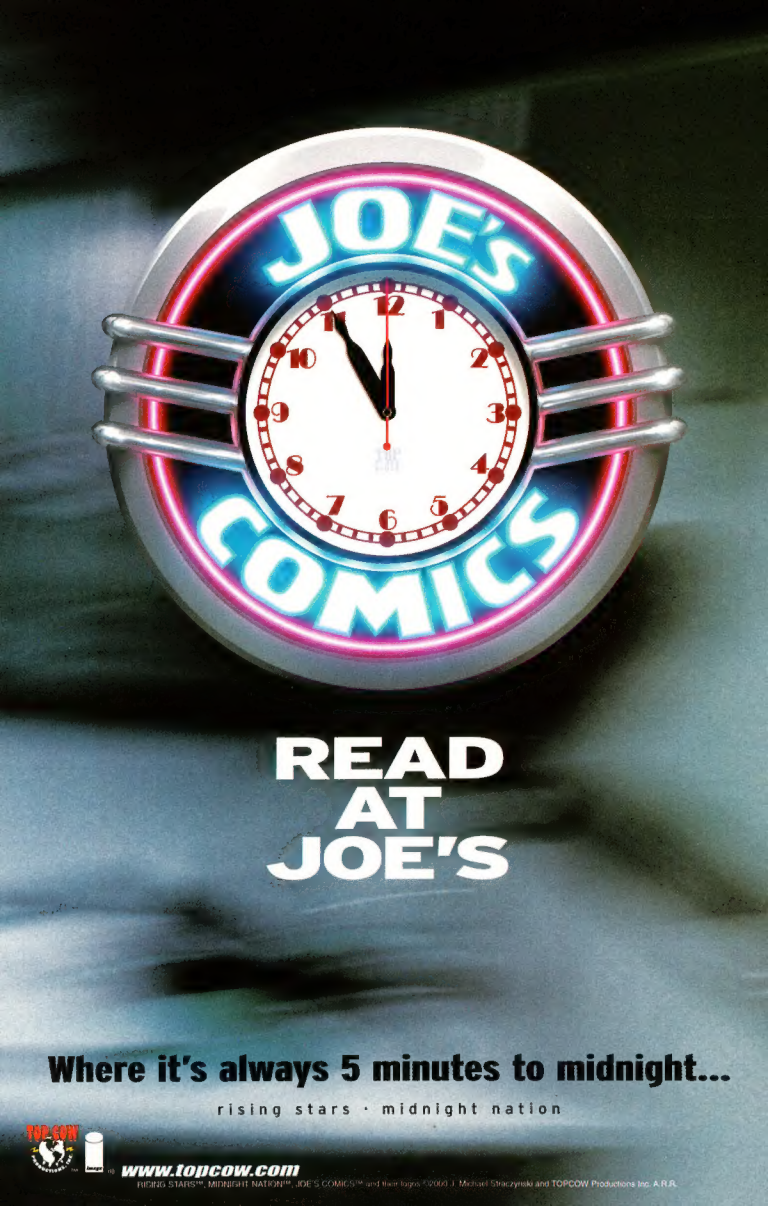
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